TWINKLY EYES AND THE LONE LAKE FOLK

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ALLEN CHAFFEE

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"Bluff held back, whining"

TWINKLY EYES
AND
THE LONE LAKE FOLK

A True-to-Nature Story

BY

ALLEN CHAFFEE

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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To My Father,
in memory of my childhood's
menagerie

INTRODUCTION

Here are some more true-to-nature stories for children and those of their elders who still enjoy woods life and lore.

The scene is laid in the North Woods, where Baldy the Eagle and the Fish Hawk and Kingfisher families can still best the mere human angler at landing a speckled trout, and where that little black rascal, Twinkly Eyes, the bear, and Mother Black Bear and her two new babies, and Unk Wunk the Porcupine, and Old Man Lynx, and Frisky Fox, have new adventures, and make the acquaintance of Madame Mink, and the Otter and Raccoon families, and cross old Mother Badger, and Mephitis the Skunk.

Each chapter makes a separate story, for the most part (though all are connected),—and that it may be suitable for bedtime reading, no animal hero is ever killed. But

though most of the adventures are amusing (as well as instructive),—behind Twinkly's pranks we could find some pretty solid character if we wanted to look for it.

Then there is the trapper,—but we mustn't tell too much before-hand, must we, kiddies?

Your friend,

ALLEN CHAFFEE.

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TWINKLY EYES AND THE LONE LAKE FOLK

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE BLACK BEAR

ALL the long, cold winter, Twinkly Eyes, the little black bear, had slept, as snug as could be, in his den under the tree-root.

The snows had whirled and the winds had whistled across the mountain-side, but the yearling cub had kept as warm as toast. For the snow-drift kept the wind out, and with his thick fur coat, and the blanket of fat that he wore just inside his skin, he had only to roll himself into a ball, with his toes inside, and he hadn't a trouble on earth. His dreams were all of summer in the blueberry patch.

The rascal thought he was hidden and no one could find him, away up there on the

side of Mount Olaf. But there was one thing that gave him away completely. The warmth of his breathing had melted a chimney right through the top of his house; and the "smoke" made the snow all yellow. Father Red Fox could tell from that alone that a bear was inside.—(Even if his nose hadn't told him so. For every one of the wood folk has his own brand of perfume, and most of them can tell more with their noses than we can with our eyes.)

The meadow mice used to spy upon the little bear's hiding place as he slept. The snow was tracked like fine lace with their funny foot-prints. Had Twinkly Eyes but known, he would surely have come out and chased them. For he was a famous mouser.

But when the April sun had melted the snow on his roof, and he woke up with a yawn, and began stretching his legs, they heard him, and scampered away to their tunnels.

When he first thrust his head through the snow-bank that blocked his door-way, he could only wink and blink at the sunshine,

which glittered on the snow crust. By and by he could see down into the valley where the snow had melted. There was Lone Lake, as blue as could be, though the willows were still brown and leafless around its rim. But his sharp little ears caught the nasal quacking of ducks tipping about in the shallow margin for clams.

"Hurray! Spring has come!" he whoofed joyously. And he started shuffling so fast down the slope that all four feet slipped out from beneath him.—Whish!—away he slid, flat on his little round tummy!

"Right side up, with care!" he told himself, when he came to a stop at the marsh that bordered Lone Lake. He shook himself, then gave a grunt of pleasure. For the ground was dotted green and brown with skunk cabbages, the very best kind of spring tonic known to the Black Bear family.

Some of them were still wrapped in their spiky green capes, though a few were already in blossom, inside their brown striped tents. The little bear ate the flower out of one which he pulled free with two claws, and

never even made a face at the bitter flavor. (There was no one to make a face at.) Then he nibbled the tips of a willow. But he wasn't really hungry yet. His stomach had been so empty all winter that it had shrunk to almost nothing, and it would be two weeks before he would want a square meal.

That coasting had been fun, though. He decided to try it again. But first, what was that message on the smell-telephone stump at the crossing of the trails?

"Brother Woof!" said his nose. Sure enough, there were Woof's flat little foot-prints zig-zagging around a big rock.

"Whoof! Whoof!" roared someone, springing out at him from behind a tree-trunk. The ducks flew up in afright as the two cubs rolled and tumbled, clinching, biting and cuffing one another in a sham fight.

They were glad of the meeting, though; for woods, lake and mountain-side, all were theirs to explore!—Little did they dream what dangers lay in wait, so bold had they

become since Mother Black Bear had sent them to shift for themselves!

First they raced each other up the mountain-side, following Twinkly's trail along the brook-bed. Then they tried to dig out a nest of mice they could hear in the rock-slide, where the wind had swept the snow away. But on these upper slopes, the ground was still frozen hard as ice.

Then Twinkly Eyes gave his brother a shove, and sent him sliding down a snow-bank, flat on his back.

"I'll get *you,* for that!" threatened Woof, galloping back to where his tormentor sat laughing at him. But just as he reached the spot, Twinkly threw himself flat on his chest, shoving off with a swimming motion, and coasted out of his reach.

Woof somer-saulted head over heels as he tried to catch up, but before he could reach bottom, Twinkly was back at the top. This time the rascal spied a better slide,—a long hill slope as smooth as glass, with its frozen crust; and off he started, "belly-bumps,"

before Woof could climb back again. There were no trees to stop him,—nothing but a long, steep slide for as far as he could see. Nothing could be jollier.

Faster and faster he whizzed down the incline, in a swirl of snow-dust that almost blinded him.

"Splurf!" he choked. "Someone stop me, quick!" For he suddenly remembered that in summer this was the hill that shot over the edge of a cliff. If he were to go coasting over that cliff, no telling how far he might fall,—nor what would happen to him when he got through falling!

"Help! Help!" he squealed again, though he knew he would have to help himself, if anyone did.

Clutching at the snow-crust, in vain he tried for a foot-hold; but his claws found nothing to grab hold of.

Whirling about, he rolled over and over till he could slide sitting down, with his heels digging into the snow. Then he came to a bump, and the next thing he knew, he had turned a cart-wheel, and was once more

flat on his chest, and going faster than ever.

His heart thumped with fright as he saw the edge of the cliff just ahead.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE ADVENTURE

"HELP! Help!" squealed Twinkly Eyes, as he slid faster and faster over the snow crust.

Then it happened!—Straight off the cliff into space he flew!—Head over heels went the little black bear, his fat hind legs doubled about his neck. Then—he landed on the top of the giant drift that had banked up against the cliff.

But though the snow-drift broke the speed of his fall, it didn't stop his downward progress. The snow gave way beneath him and he kept right on. Down, down, down he went, through a smother of white. Then, suddenly, he came to a halt.

But where was he? At the bottom of the white chimney his round little body had made in the snow-bank! It was like being at the bottom of a great, hollow tree. Only

if it really had been a tree, he could have climbed right out. But the snow walls gave way beneath his claws, and he could gain no foot-hold.

For one awful moment he wondered if he would have to stay there, a prisoner, till he starved.

"Oh, well," he sniffed at last, "if you can't do a thing one way, you can another. I'll just dig a tunnel"

Soon he was as busy as a beaver (who works hard when he has to, though that isn't very often, if the truth were known.) It was easy going,—through the soft snow. A faint light sifted through the whiteness, and it wasn't half bad fun. Then he began to get hungry.

Pausing to rest for a moment,—for it was work that warmed one up,—his ears rose to the sound of a little squeak.

"A mouse!" said Twinkly Eyes, with delight. "Isn't that just my luck?"

The sound had come from almost beneath him, yet he could see nothing. The moss that covered the ground was frozen hard.

He could just get his claws into a crack. Now he could hear excited squeaking all about him, and the scuffling of tiny feet.

In another moment he had loosed a layer of the moss. There, beneath his very eyes, lay a regular mouse village, with tiny underground streets and run-ways criss-crossing one another. He had found a colony of field mice. His nose told him that much, even before he caught a glimpse of one of the queer, short tailed fellows.

Crouched like a puppy, he waited beside the run-way he had uncovered. It was a game of patience. Sure enough, after a long, long time, a blunt brown nose peeked out at him. In a twinkling the little bear had ripped off another section of the tunnel roof, and clapped his paw on a mouse. That solved the problem of what to have for supper.

It was dark now, and the warmth of his breath had made his prison so snug and comfy that Twinkly Eyes decided to curl up, with his nose cuddled into his arms, and sleep till to-morrow.

It didn't seem two minutes till morning came again, and to his surprise he had tunneled out in no time. The drift hadn't been nearly so long as he had fancied.

That is the way with a lot of our troubles, he told himself. They aren't half so bad as we think they are going to be.

By noon the sun had come out so warm and bright that the snow began to melt in little rivulets that trickled musically under the drifts, as they found their way down the valleys into Lone Lake.

"Wonder where all the folks are?" Twinkly asked himself. For Woof was nowhere to be found, and he was lonesome.

Walking gingerly on feet that were tender after his winter sleep, he set about studying the trails that led through the snow and mud to Lone Lake. Already these were worn by the feet of hundreds of wood folk, —Old Man Red Fox, out after ducks, and Slim the Weasel, chasing the brown bunnies over the drifts, and Bobby Lynx the wild cat, circling the lake to watch for the trout that would show, the minute the ice should

melt. The blue sky was musical with the calls of geese as they came in great V-shaped clouds from the South.

Then with a woof of joy, Twinkly Eyes espied the shambling trail of Mother Black Bear. It led straight to a den beneath a boulder, and the half grown cub would have rushed straight in to greet her, but that she suddenly thrust her great black head through her doorway, growling a cross "Keep out!"

"But I want to come in," whined Twinkly Eyes.

"You can't,—you'll wake the babies."

"Babies!—Oh! Ple-a-s-e let me see them!"

But for answer Mother Black Bear only fell to licking the velvety fur of the two new little cubs. And no wonder she wouldn't let anyone near them. For such tiny, helpless little balls of fur as they were, all cuddled up together to keep their toes warm!

"Huh! *I* don't want to see the whining

"But I want to come in" whined Twinkly Eyes.

things," grunted Twinkly Eyes. "I'm goin' fishin' anyway."

And off he shambled on his flat hind feet down the trail.

Now Twinkly was not the only one of the wood folk who had been coasting. No sooner had he started to cross the ravine than he heard a rumbling from up the mountain-side. The next moment he was racing madly to get out of the way of the most uncanny object he had ever seen.

But first let us go back to the Valley Farm, at the foot of Mount Olaf.

The self-same night that the little black bear had spent under the snow-drift, the most peculiar gnawing had awakened the Hired Man, as he lay tucked up to his ears in the barn-loft. At first he thought it was a rat, but the sound was too loud for that. Besides, a rat would have ceased—at least for a moment—when he hammered his boots on the floor. But this sound went right on, monotonously, without a break.

Then suddenly Jake's hair began to rise

on his scalp. What if it was a panther, or a great old bear roused from his winter's sleep and savage with hunger?

Thrusting his cold feet noiselessly into his lumberman's boots, he tiptoed to the little dormer window and peered down into the moonlit barn-yard.

There was nothing there. The Hired Man's scalp grew pricklier. It must have been a ghost.

That the place was haunted Jake had long suspected; in fact, ever since the night he had seen the odd monkey-face of Whitey the Barn Owl flitting through the shadows uttering his weird cry.

Then, listening with strained ears, fairly holding his breath, lest he break the silence, he suddenly heard a dry click-click. It sounded like little sticks being struck together. A moment more and he laughed aloud in his relief.—From a little round black shadow at the corner of the building had come the grunting song of a porcupine.

"Unk-wunk, unk-wunk," he sang, his dry

quills rattling together at every movement. And still the gnawing went right on.

"The impudent young rascal," muttered Jake. "I suppose he's after salt. Well, I'd rather give him a handful outright than have him gnawing into my ears all night long." He might have taken another method of quieting the weird serenade, but that the Boy from the Valley Farm had forbidden his hurting any of the wild folk.

So, lighting a tallow candle, Jake wrapped a quilt about his shivering limbs and tramped down the ladder to the storeroom. Arrived at the salt-barrel, he noted that it stood just inside the corner Unk Wunk was gnawing on. The prickly one had probably smelled it and was trying to get at it.

"There, you varmint!" the man exclaimed as he threw a handful of broken rock salt out on the snow.

But no sooner had he once more snuggled down into the blankets than the gnawing began again. And this time he began to wonder if he had really put the axe away

after that last armful of wood, or could it be his best axe-handle the pesky thing was ruining?

Grabbing up one of his heavy boots, he flung it through the window.

Of what happend next, Jake will tell to his dying day.

The boot struck Unk Wunk squarely on his prickly back. "Slap, slap," he went irately with that barbed tail of his, ramming the felt leg of the boot so full of quills that it was going to give someone a lot of fun before ever he could get it on in the morning. Then, sniffing curiously, he set to work gnawing the boot toe.

"Scat! I'll get you for that!" yelled the Hired Man, hopping about wrathfully in the remaining foot-covering. But Unk Wunk never paused in his monotonous chorus. "Unk-wunk, unk-wunk," he sang placidly, as he finished the boot.

CHAPTER III

A QUEER SNOW-BALL

THE next day, though, as the singer sat blissfully gnawing the bark of a yellow birch tree, on the slope of Mount Olaf, the Hired Man, out with a rabbit-snare, straightway looked about him for a club, feeling that what the Boy didn't know wouldn't hurt him.

Snow had followed snow that winter, and it still lay deep in the hollows of the stream beds. Just how deep it was right there, Jake in his snow-shoes had no means of telling. At any rate, the day had turned mild and sunny, and he noticed that down at the foot of the slope little tricklets of water flowed from beneath the bank. That meant that the snow was melting underneath.

As the man turned with club upraised, ready to fell the little porcupine with one

swinging blow, he suddenly heard a slow, rumbling sound beneath his feet. At the same instant the snow began to move. With one yell of dismay, the man leaped clear of the drift, bracing himself in the branches of a stunted spruce tree.

Unk Wunk was not so fortunate.

As the mass of snow on which he sat began to slide down the mountainside he was caught just too far from either boundary to get out of the way, even had the stubborn fellow had a mind to.

So, accustomed as he was to bracing himself inside his barbed coat at whatever slings and arrows of outrageous fortune came his way, he simply stood his ground, like a huge pin-cushion with the points all out, till it was too late for him to attempt a getaway.

Yes, sir, Unk Wunk the porcupine was certainly caught that time. One moment he had lain placidly gnawing the root of the birch tree, and the next, the whole thawing snow-bank was sliding down the gulch.

Very, very seldom had Unk Wunk found it necessary to run away. What with his quills, which float him like a cork in the water, and his ability to fatten on bark, he had ever been secure from both flood and famine, to say nothing of enemies in fur.

In fact, he had never had to be very alert. His wits were quite untrained, save alone in his little way of waiting till the attacking one invited a slap of his armored tail.

Thus he did not quite realize the peril of his present situation. He made no effort to escape.

Soon he found himself being bumped and hurled along at a pace faster than he could have run. From underneath the sliding mass, which had banked too heavily, came a rumbling noise like low thunder, though the sun was shining warmly all the time. It was most uncanny.

Now the snow was swirling around him like white spray, filling his eyes and making it hard for him to breathe.

Suddenly he had an idea. Doubling him-

self into a prickly ball, with his unprotected face and stomach safely tucked inside, he just simply allowed himself to roll. And what with the slope of the mountain and the roundness of the ball he made, with his quills all laid smooth against his sides, he went even faster than the snowslide, so that he stayed on top, instead of falling into the shaking mass and being crushed and buried beneath it.

Yes, sir, that young porcupine actually came out on top.

In fact, if you have ever rolled a snowball till it got bigger and bigger and bigger the farther you rolled it, you saw just how he gathered snow on his quills till he looked like a great white ball that grew fatter the farther it rolled.

He reached the bottom of the slope just ahead of the snowslide, but still he kept on rolling. And his rind was so thick that he hadn't an idea where he was. (Twinkly stopped to stare at the queer snow-ball.)

On and on he rolled, faster and faster and faster, till he had rolled clear down to Lone

Lake. There the huge ball skated across the ice so fast that when it came up against a tree at the other end, it hit with a bang, flying into a hundred pieces.

Unk Wunk slowly uncurled himself and gazed about him. Then, seeing that all was well, after all, he peacefully settled himself at the foot of the tree for a taste of beech bark.

The Hired Man laughed so hard that he got all over being cross with him. When at last he had reached a point where he could see the end of the race: "Well, I declare!" he gasped, "the rascal deserves to go free, after all he's been through. He's got nerve, and no mistake."

Frisky Fox, in the den just back of the pond, however, thought quite differently about it.

CHAPTER IV

WHICH WAS FOXIER?

"FATHER," begged young Frisky, as he snuggled closer to Old Man Red Fox, "won't you tell me just once more how it was you caught that porcupine when you were my age?"

"Well, son," said the old fox, smiling at his memories, "there was the porcupine sprawled out on the top of a snow-bank, gnawing the bark of a spruce tree. And he was so confident of his safety that he wouldn't even look around when he heard me bark.

"Quills all over till you couldn't touch him anywhere, (except his under side), without getting badly hurt. And he knew it."

"But my, how you feasted on porcupine that night," said Frisky, licking his chops at

the thought, yellow eyes gleaming in the darkness of the cave.

"How do you suppose I did it?" demanded Old Man Red Fox.

"Why, I suppose one would try to grab him where there weren't any quills."

"But how?" insisted Father Red Fox. He was anxious to cultivate keenness of wit in this promising youngster of his.

"It would be pretty hard to turn him over, without getting your paw full of quills, wouldn't it, father?"

"It certainly would, for a fox, though a bear or a lynx might manage it with their great iron claws."

"And a fox never wants to get a sore foot," reasoned Frisky, "when his life and his living depend on his fleetness."

"Right again," said Red Fox proudly.

"Well, then," decided the pup, "I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd just simply burrow under the snow till I got right under the fellow, then I'd make a quick grab upward through the snow and set my teeth in his heart. And when he was quite, quite still,

I'd flip him over on his back and eat the meat right out of the shell, without once getting too near the quills."

"Good!" said Father Red Fox; "only don't forget the last part, for if one of those barbs gets into your mouth, it will go clear through to your brain, if it doesn't starve you by slow torture."

"But that's the way to do it, isn't it?" Frisky demanded proudly.

His father's eyes twinkled delightedly. "Just what I did, exactly. Go to it, son!"

Frisky peered out at the now starlit expanse of the forest floor, across which not even a mouse's trail could be seen. It had been a couple of days now since he had had a real square meal, and it was getting to the point where all he could think of was the empty feeling in his little tummy.

"It's either that or the chicken-house at the Valley Farm," he decided. And while Frisky had as much sheer courage as anyone, he could smell the iron of the Hired Man's gun at the thought, and he had watched his brother make the attempt one

moonlight night.—His brother had not come back.

"Guess I'll try the porcupine," he finally decided.

Now it was one thing for a red fox pup to think out a way of catching the fat porcupine, and quite another to do it. For of all the four-footed folk in the forest, Unk Wunk is the most surprising.

When Frisky fared forth that night to find him a dinner, he was famished enough to tackle anything, however desperate it might seem.

At the first sound of the little snow-slide that had brought Unk Wunk down the mountainside so quickly, he had stared and stared, as the huge white ball had skidded across the pond. When it rolled against the tree and smashed into a dozen pieces, and Unk Wunk had lazily uncurled himself, and set to gnawing the bark, young Frisky Fox had taken it all in with those sharp eyes of his, and mulled it over with his sharper wits.

Evidently, he had reasoned, Unk Wunk had a placid disposition and did not intend

to let himself be disturbed by anything that went on around, above or underneath him. Why then, so much the better for his plan.

The fox pup walked softly, and for at least half an hour there was no sound in all the woods around save the gnawing of Unk Wunk's long front teeth, as he ate his supper, and his contented little grunting song. But Mother Grouse Hen and her brood, hiding snug and warm beneath a snow-bank, were more than a little startled by the sound of a moving form making its way beneath the surface of the snow.

Despite the North Woods' April chill, the little porcupine lay sprawled at ease over the snow that banked against the foot of the tree. He felt secure in the knowledge that, should an enemy approach from behind, slap-slap would go that barbed tail of his, leaving the intruder stuck full of quills.

But Frisky knew that the porcupine's under side had no quills to protect it. Digging down clear underneath the surface of the snow, he began creeping, creeping, creeping ever so stealthily toward the point where a

fat black shadow told him Unk Wunk lay.

And Unk Wunk's song, his own name over and over again, came to the velvet ears of the red fox pup, filling him with irritation at the other's contentment,—to be himself so hollowed-sided, and the other one rolling in fat!

Frisky burrowed silently. With his agile black paws he made his way through the snow, till at last he was directly beneath the little porcupine. Then darting straight at the place where Unk Wunk's chest should be, he brought his jaws together with a snap.

His teeth closed on a mouthful of air—nothing more. For the little porcupine had the instant before decided to climb the tree.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" laughed Jimmy Crow from the sentinel pine above.

Frisky clicked his teeth at him. "I'll get *you* some day!" he barked wrathfully.

Twinkly Eyes suddenly burst from his hiding-place, for he could keep still no longer.

"Huh! You want to watch *me* turn him over," he boasted, remembering the way his

mother used to flip the prickly fellow to his back with just the edge of her claws. But at that very instant he stepped on a porcupine quill, and by the time he had got that out of his foot he was ready to call it a day.

CHAPTER V

THE BEST OF THE BARGAIN

TWINKLY EYES gave a yap of pleasure as he spied the pigeon-toed footprints of Snapper the big snapping turtle, whose iron beak always made swimming a bit of an adventure for one.

Snapper didn't have much use for the little bear.—Who would, when every chance he got, he turned her over on her back, with all fours waving helplessly? To-day she no sooner spied the mischievous rascal than she waddled off into the lake and hid just under a root that over-hung the bank.

Now as it happened, that was the very root that Twinkly had selected to fish from. Stretching himself out blissfully, with one paw dangling ready to slap his claws into the first nice tender fingerling trout that passed, he began watching the flash of silvery forms farther out.

"Um!" he was just thinking, "What a feast I shall have!" when something hard and sharp suddenly nabbed his paw.

"Let go!" squealed Twinkly in pained surprise, tugging to get loose.

"I shan't!" hissed a familiar voice. "I'll teach you to meddle with *me!*"—It was Snapper herself!

"Gr-r-r!" growled the little bear. "I'll eat you alive, if you don't let go!"

But Snapper only clung to the furry black paw, which her jaws hurt cruelly. "I'm going to bite it clear off, and then you can never turn me over on my back again," she assured him.

Twinkly, staring, frightened, at her ugly snake-like head, could quite believe her.

Snapper had jaws like steel, and she would as soon eat a bear paw as she would a fish. Her humpy, thick-shelled back protected her everywhere (except for the legs that she had to keep paddling to keep her afloat).

"Of course it wasn't very kind of me to tease her," poor Twinkly told himself.

"But after all, I only meant it for a joke. I didn't really hurt her. But if something doesn't happen quick, I'll have to go through life on three legs!"

But the little bear must have been born lucky. For at that very moment a big spiny Pike,—a fish with as evil an eye as Snapper's herself,—came swimming by; and spying the big turtle with her back turned and her feet waving free of her shell, he decided to see what a leg would taste like.

Rushing like a green streak for his prey, he took her left hind foot at one big gulp and began trying to swallow it.

Snapper, attacked thus from the rear, was taken by surprise, and turned her head to see. At the moment it seemed more worth while to snap her jaws at the Pike than to punish Twinkly Eyes. Mother Black Bear's young hopeful needed no second hint to run away from such a dangerous neighborhood. He didn't even wait to see who won, Snapper or the Pike. His paw hurt dreadfully, and all he wanted in this world

was to hide himself in the bushes and lick it till he made it well again.

There were other fishermen besides himself that day. Twinkly, nursing his paw in the bushes, fell to watching two of them. A pair of great, broad winged birds were circling like aeroplanes above the lake. They wore brown plumage, with white undervests, so that, looking up at them from beneath, he could hardly see them against the light of the sky.—Neither could the fish, which was of course the reason why Father and Mother Osprey dressed that way.

Closing her wings tight to her sides, Mother Osprey suddenly dove through the air, and splashed head foremost through the brown lake water after a trout. In a moment she rose again, a fish in her great curved claws, her yellow eyes gleaming hungrily; and with wings flapping the water off in a spray, flew up into a tree to enjoy her dinner.

Holding the fish firmly with one foot, she started tearing off great, greedy bites with

her strong curved beak, searching the sky as she did so, as if afraid.

(What could such a great bird possibly be afraid of, wondered the little black bear?)

Then from away off on the peak of Mount Olaf he heard a harsh "cac-cac-cac!" followed by a burst of wild, almost human laughter. It was Baldy, the white-headed eagle. Swift as the wind came Baldy, on his great, broad wings. The air whistled to the sound of his flight: and Mother Osprey ate faster and faster.

Now Twinkly noticed her mate spiraling above the lake. At last he, too, took the downward plunge, darting through the water after a fleeing fish. He made his catch. Rising in a shower of spray, he, too, made as if to take up his perch on the old pine, where he could devour his meal. But Baldy was just overhead now, his harsh cry sounding his threats.

Of course an eagle is so large and strong, and he can fight so terribly with his great

hooked beak and his curved steel talons, that he isn't afraid of anything. But he is mighty poor at catching fish. And there is nothing he loves better than a fat speckled trout.

He gets his fill, though,—as Twinkly Eyes discovered.

The instant Father Osprey saw Baldy coming, he left his perch and began racing through the air with his fish tight clutched in his talons. Baldy began racing, too, and Mother Osprey followed, screaming threats at Baldy. The air whizzed with the beat of angry wings, and the three birds together filled Twinkly's ears with their raucous screaming.

It was Mother Osprey who did most of the sparring, because her mate was weighted down with his catch. Flapping her broad wings sharply in the eagle's face, she tried hard to distract his attention from the fish. But it was no use. Baldy knew he could always win in a fight, and the Ospreys knew it too; so when he insisted, Father Osprey simply did not dare run the risk of having

that dreadful beak take a bite out of him.

He suddenly let go his trout, and Baldy darted after it as it fell, meaning to catch it before it reached the water.

But as luck would have it, the fish struck against a high branch of the tall sugar maple, and instead of falling the way Baldy was counting on, it bounced off side-wise.—It fell at Twinkly's very feet!

CHAPTER VI

TWO STRANGE CREATURES

"TALK about luck!" said Twinkly Eyes, as he set his teeth into the fish that the eagle had let drop.

But at that same moment he caught sight of his brother Woof peering at him through the bushes. His first thought was to sit down on the fish so that Woof wouldn't see it, and on this thought he acted promptly. But it didn't work. Had Woof been farther away, it might have. But Woof had a nose as wonderful as Twinkly's. He could smell fish a very long distance away.

"Stingy!" he whined hungrily.

"What do you mean, 'stingy'?" teased Twinkly, with a stare of wide-eyed innocence.

For answer, Woof stood up on his fat hind legs and gave his brother a smart cuff

over the ear. Of course that started a wrestling match. It wasn't till they rolled clinched fast in each other's arms into the lake that their wrath was cooled.

They emerged, shaking themselves like puppies, only to find that Bobby Lynx had made off with the fish!

After that there was nothing left to do but to hunt around in the sand to see if Snapper the turtle had hidden her eggs yet.

Several days passed, during which the warm yellow sun turned the naked willows into a mist of feathery green, and set the snowy hillsides to trickling musically. Twinkly Eyes spent most of his time searching for tender grass roots and new young green stuff.

One moon-light night he hid in the willow shrubs again to watch the wood folk come down to the lake for a drink. First there was Fleet Foot the doe and her two new little spotted fawns, who waded delicately into the shallows till a sudden move on the part of the bear cub sent them leaping back into the shadows, the doe leading the way

with her "Hew!" of alarm and her white flag raised.

Next came Frisky, the red fox pup, and Unk Wunk the prickly porcupine,—waddling along like a black and white needle cushion,—and finally Father Black Bear, so cross and empty and sore-footed after his winter's nap that Twinkly Eyes didn't even dare say "Hello, Pop!"

Then the little black bear saw something that made him blink his eyes to make sure he saw straight. Directly across from this arm of Lone Lake was a long, steep bank that ended in deep water. This bank, he had noticed, was smooth and muddy every morning, even when the rest of the ground was dry. Now suddenly two strange creatures appeared at the top of the bank and went coasting ker-splash into the pool beneath. No sooner had they paddled their way to the bank and climbed to the top than slide, splash, down they went again, head foremost, dragging their long, flat tails behind them. (What could they be, Twinkly wondered?) Again and again they climbed

the bank,—only to slide back into the pool.

That, Twinkly told himself, must be why the bank was always smooth and muddy in the morning.

His heart warmed to the newcomers, who enjoyed coasting just as he did. But what strange-looking folk they were,—these Otters. When they raised their whiskered, puppy-like faces from the water to give a look about, they might have been huge snakes, with their little round heads at the end of their long necks, their tiny ears laid flat.

From the ease with which they swam, Twinkly surmised that they had webbed feet like ducks, and they used their broad, flat tails, like muskrats, to steer with. He wondered that they climbed the bank so swiftly, seeing how short their legs were. Their long bodies gleamed like silk in the moonlight.

After awhile the sleek fellows began thinking of breakfast,—for they sleep by day, and our evening is their morning. The moon-lit lake was cut into gleaming V-

shaped ripples by the muskrats as they swam; and at first the Otters contented themselves with chasing these mal-odorous fellows. But they much preferred the delicate flavor of the trout; and soon they made their way down to the stretch of rough water where Beaver Brook rushed into the lake.

Here gold and silver fish ranged restlessly as they searched for caddis worms, their red fins glinting in the foamy water. Of course the instant they saw the Otters, they made for the quiet pools under the over-hanging branches. This was always a safe place when there were fish-hawks about. But the Otters only dove smoothly after them, crunching first one, and then another through the back-bone and letting the dead bodies rise to the surface, there to float in the moonlight till the fishermen were ready for them. The warier trout, finding the pool a dangerous place, tried to make for the exit. But the Otters headed them off and they fared no better than the others had done.

Now Twinkly Eyes had noticed, just at

sunset, a V-shaped flock of geese that had come "Honk, honk, k'honk," out of the sky to the south, and had slanted down to a tiny islet out in the lake. Here, after gabbling through a supper of such water plants as they could find, they had tucked their heads under their wings and gone to sleep.

Twinkly wondered how they could feel so safe, with Old Man Red Fox and Bobby Lynx in the woods hard by. Then he learned the answer. First he saw Red Fox come down to the lake shore and peer longingly at the flock. But this fellow valued his plumy tail far too much to get it wet merely to gratify his palate, so he only yapped his disappointment and trotted away again.—Bobby had been the same, unwilling to wet his fur.

No such scruples could affect the Otter and his mate. No sooner had they spied the gray-brown birds, with their white collars and their black heads and tails, than they swam up to them under water where the sentinel goose could not see them, and with one snap of his jaws the dog Otter

grabbed the nearest bird,—and Twinkly Eyes, forgetting his lesson with the musk-rats, got so excited that he splashed right in and swam across to the islet to see the excitement. The Otters promply disappeared at the unusual sound. But the geese, with one accord, rose angrily and began beating the little bear about the head with their great wings, trying for a bite at him. For of course he was the only one they could see to blame.

CHAPTER VII

THE NAUGHTY COUSIN

TWINKLY EYES studied the tracks that criss-crossed the rim of Lone Lake.

Beside the foot-prints of his own fat little hind feet, (so like those a human child might make,) were tinier prints, as like his own as his were like his mother's.—These tinier bear-like tracks, he knew, were those of his cousin Lotor, the raccoon.

Lotor must have moved into some near-by tree, handy to the fishing-grounds; and knowing his habit of sleeping by day and fishing all night long, Twinkly Eyes decided to watch, when the moon came up, and see where Lotor was making his new home.

So he chased his wee-bit tail awhile, and dug for violet roots; then he, too, went to sleep in a naked tree-top where he could snooze in the April sunshine rocked by every

little breeze,—though with one ear open, ready to hear the slightest sign of danger.

But there was nowhere anything more alarming than the blue sky and the bird calls, and the odor of new young green things.

That evening, just before the great, honey-colored disc of the moon rose from behind the East ridge of Mount Olaf, Twinkly Eyes hid himself behind two trees that grew close together, between which he could survey the lake shore.

Soon there was a movement in the top of an old chestnut tree, and from a dark round hole a gray form glided, backing down the trunk tail first.

"Cousin Lotor," Twinkly told himself.—He was followed by a second form, the new Mrs. Lotor, who backed down the tree, swinging her head from side to side just the way Mother Black Bear always did, as she tried to see on all sides at once.

The two coons made straight for Clam Point, a neck of the lake where fresh-water clams were plentiful,—so plentiful, in fact,

that a little colony of muskrats had built their little mud tepees all along the bank.

Lotor led the way to the clam bank, his fluffy, fox-like tail showing its dark rings in the moonlight, and the black patch across his eyes making his pointed little face look as if it wore a burglar's mask. They made a handsome pair, though. They walked with the same swaying motion that marks the bear tribe, showing their kinship in their arching hips. Twinkly wished he were as clever at finding clams as they were. His mouth watered as he watched them banqueting.

Clever as monkeys with their hand-like paws, Lotor and his mate began a search of the clam beds, sitting down to eat their find with their backs against a log so that no one could surprise them from behind. They pried the shells apart when they could, picking out the juicy morsels and eating with one paw. If a clam were hard to open, they hammered it on a rock.

But what surprised Twinkly Eyes the most, (for he had never watched them quite

so close before,) was that they washed each bivalve by sousing it up and down in the water.

"Hello, there!" he called presently, shuffling out into a patch of moonlight.

"Hello yourself," chorused the clam diggers, in their queer little whinnying voices.

"I see you are pretty careful what you eat," said the little black bear.

"We don't believe in eating sand."

"That's right. I shouldn't myself.—Are you going to make your home in one of these hollow trees?" asked Twinkly in his pleasantest grunt.

Mrs. Lotor only gave her husband a look that as much as said: "Don't tell!"

"Our home is already selected," said Lotor cautiously. "But the Mrs., here, has decided to keep it a secret." And Twinkly remembered that there were probably baby 'coons.

"But you don't mind *my* knowing?" begged the little black bear.

"A secret isn't a secret if you tell it," Mrs. Lotor smiled mysteriously. "I know

you are mostly a vegetarian, but—well, we've just simply made it a rule not to tell anyone at all,—not even you, cousin Twinkly Eyes."

The little black bear smiled craftily as he thought of the hollow chestnut tree. "It would only worry them if they knew I knew," he decided. But it *will* be fun to watch that tree, once the 'coon cubs get big enough to be taken fishing." (He decided to change the subject before he gave his own secret away.)

After that he used to watch the hollow chestnut every night. But the little inmates were still too young to be taken out. He did see something else, though, that filled him with amazement.

This swampy part of the lake, that looked so quiet by day, was the busiest place you can imagine after dark. Out of each of those muskrat houses would come a whole family of these water rats. They would appear suddenly, popping out of their secret doorways,—which were as often as not under water,—just the tips of their noses showing.

They were funny fellows, as big as bunnies, (not counting their flat tails). Their feet were webbed like ducks', which made them expert swimmers. Their favorite food, too, seemed to be the little clams that they found under the bank. But instead of eating each one as they found it, they had a way of gathering a large pile and hiding it under a stone.

Then one day he saw that which made him open his eyes in surprise. Lotor had been searching hungrily along the bank. Then suddenly, he came upon one of these hoards.

"Come on!" he whinnied to Mrs. Lotor.

"Oh, you wicked thieves!" said Twinkly Eyes, wondering if he would have yielded to temptation himself, had he been hungry.

But just then the angry rats discovered the way they had been made to share their surplus. Now the law of the woods is very strict in such matters, and they promptly set to work to punish the thieves, (who only escaped a bad biting by taking to the nearest tree.)

Of course Twinkly, being found in such

company, came in for a share of the blame, —though the rats were afraid to do more than glare reproachfully at him, as they backed into the water.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PEACE MAKER

LITTLE could Twinkly Eyes, crouched flat on an over-hanging limb, foresee how that night was to end!

From his airy perch he could see straight into the nests of the little brown-black ducks, who had chosen this quiet cove of Lone Lake for its wild rice and pond lily pads,—and because there were no muskrats near.

This evening they were searching the muddy bottom for snails and clams and caddis worms. They looked so comical, as they stretched their heads down beneath the water with their tails tipped straight up into the air. Between dives, they spattered along the surface of the water, half flying and half running, quack-quack-quacking, everyone talking at once.

Suddenly the old drake who was on the

look-out announced the approach of a hawk, and they rose obliquely through the air, their wings whistling in the wind. It was amazing how swiftly they could climb the sky.—That is, the drakes could!—Their mates stayed bravely on their nests among the reeds to keep the gray-green eggs warm, trusting to their quiet plumage to keep them hidden.

These leafy nests, Twinkly Eyes could see, were lined with something soft and white; but it was not until the hawk had passed and been forgotten, and he saw the little brown mother plucking the downy feathers from her breast, that he could guess what the lining was made of.

Twinkly watched the anxious little mother for awhile, then allowed his eyes to rove farther in-shore. Mercy! What was that? Inside a hollow stump on the bank beneath his hiding place, concealed by the tall flag lilies, a mother Mink had a cozy nest. At first Twinkly thought she must be a snake. Then he made out her long, furry body, with its narrow pointed head and flat little ears.

He wondered if the brown duck could know!

Presently she went frog-hunting, and he could see that her feet were partly webbed, which made it easy for her to swim.

Then there was a rustling of the grass stems which Twinkly knew meant a meadow mouse, and he was just about to drop down on it when Madame Mink leaped soundlessly from the water and began chasing it through its narrow runway in the grass.

Now, as it happened, Whoo-Whoo, the great gray owl, was also after that mouse. Madame Mink, in the grassy tunnel, did not see the shadowy shape come winging towards them, and of course she couldn't even hear the teeniest sound, because an owl makes no sound at all when he flies.

Whoo-Whoo's great eyes gleamed hungrily. For he had seen the mink. He would have a feast tonight!—Softly, softly, he swooped above her, his claws spread to grab her. He could catch a mouse any night, but mink was a rare treat. Swiftly he dropped to the ground and raked the runway with his murderous foot.—But Madame

Mink was not there. For at that very instant the tunnel had twisted down underground, and she had followed Mr. Meadow Mouse into the dark labyrinth. (A labyrinth, you know, is a mysterious path that winds and twists and turns, this way and that, in the most confusing manner.) And that is just what Mr. Meadow Mouse had been racing for. If his pursuer had been even the size of a fox pup it would have been too large to follow. Not so with the mink. Her long, lithe body simply wriggled around each turn almost as easily as did his stubby one. No, Sir-ee, Madame Mink was not to be kept out by any hole large enough to hide a rat!

Quite as if she knew that the owl still waited for her to poke her nose outside, she had no sooner finished with the mouse than she darted back along the tunnel to the water's edge, and dove beneath the surface, where the owl could not follow.—There she waited, nose just barely above water, till Whoo-Whoo gave it up and went in pursuit of a rabbit.

So far Twinkly's sympathies had been with the mink. But he was soon to change his opinion of her. For no sooner had the wicked creature made sure the owl was gone than she sneaked into the brown duck's nest, which Brownie had left only that moment while she dove for a clam.

When poor Brownie came back, her fourteen eggs were smashed, and Madame Mink's brown whiskers were stained with egg yolk.

Twinkly Eyes was positively glad when he saw an otter creep out on the bank and dash along the musky-scented trail to the stump where Madame Mink lived.—But the Madame was not to be caught napping. Darting over the rim of the stump like lightning, she leaped into the nearest tree,—the very one Twinkly Eyes was in,—and from that to another whose branches interlaced till they formed an aerial bridge. And so frightened was she that she employed her last means of self-defense, emitting such a dreadful odor that the otter made up his

mind he didn't want mink for supper after all.

So far, so good, thought Twinkly Eyes. But hark!—The otter, deprived of his first quarry, made a dash at Brownie, who stood sadly looking over her ruined nest, to see if there wasn't at least one of the pretty eggs left for her to raise into a duckling.

This was too much for the audience. A gleam of mischief crept into his eyes. With one mighty splash he dropped into the water, sending the otter, terrified, to the other end of the lake, and scaring even the little duck he had saved.

Around on the other side of Lone Lake a very different scene was taking place. It seems that just across the neck of the lake from the little family in the chestnut tree, (Twinkly's cousin Lotor and his mate), lived another family of raccoons. (They were Twinkly's cousins, too,—were Ringtail and Mrs. Ringtail.) Lotor had not known it when he moved, else he could have guessed that the fishing grounds might be claimed by

someone else. As it was, no sooner had he and his bride begun fishing from the great log that here formed a bridge out into the water, drifting gently with one end moored by its upturned roots to the bank, than there was an angry whinnying from a rock ledge just across the way.

Now Lotor had gone on a hunting trip with Ringtail only the autumn before. They had been two of a merry band that had raided the corn-field down at the Valley Farm. They had been the best of friends. But this was different.

"These are *my* fishing grounds," Lotor began. "I got here first!"—And he really thought he had.

"You did not!"

"Well, you don't own the lake."

"We own this corner of it, anyway."

And the first think Twinkly knew, the four were fairly making the fur fly.

Suddenly his eyes began twinkling more than ever. Taking a high dive from an over-hanging limb, he splashed straight into the midst of the melee.

"The otter deprived of her first quarry, made a dash at Brownie."

Alas, for the fate of the peace-maker!—He stopped the quarrel,—for the time, at least,—only to have all four raccoons turn on himself, too furious to know who it was they were fighting.

CHAPTER IX

"CROSS AS A BEAR"

TWINKLY EYES had been chasing his shadow over the snow crust.

For with the abundance of trout in Lone Lake, he had filled his tummy comfortably full and gone exploring. On the peak of Mount Olaf the snow still lay, stubborn to the spring sunshine. The sky was a brilliant, cloudless blue, and the trees hung with icicles, which blazed like a forest of diamonds in the sunshine.

Around and around the fat little bear chased his lengthening shadow. At noon it had been easy to clutch it with his paw. Now it kept him whirling.—Suddenly his eye caught another shadow hovering above his own. For awhile he chased that too. Then, glancing up into the sky, his heart stood still! It was Baldy the eagle!

Twinkly was not usually afraid of Baldy,

though he had known Mother Black Bear to hide her cubs when they were small at his approach.—Indeed, he had often seen the giant bird wheeling through the sky to his eyrie on the mountain peak with a live fawn in his talons. And Twinkly remembered the affair of the trout!

Now, though, he might have forgotten. Could Baldy really hurt anyone his size, he wondered?—The shadow circled nearer. Twinkly began digging madly in an open space, pretending to catch field mice, but in reality to keep a shower of dirt flying in a protective barrage.

My, how he made the dirt fly! Grasping clods and rocks one at a time with his forepaws, he hurled them back over his shoulders in a battery that no eagle would have dared approach, had his dinner depended on it.

He could wait, thought Baldy, his eyes glowering wrathfully, as he perched in the top of a pine tree.

Faster and faster worked the little black bear, clawing and kicking the dirt away like

a puppy, till he had frightened every mouse on the hillside into the far end of his farthest tunnel.

Then, out of the tail of his eye, he noticed something that he had not seen before,—though it had been there all the time. Just an easy run down hill was a clump of the matted trees that crouched, no more than knee high, at timber line. As one comes up the mountain-side, the pines and spruces grow smaller and smaller, till at last one can gaze off across the valleys over their tops. Last of all come these tiny, flattened trees on their twisted trunks, barely able to cling to the soil against the beating of the winter wind.—After that, there is only a bit of green here and there among the rocks,—mountain cranberries and dwarf blueberries, mostly.

Twinkly Eyes took one deep breath, then galloped for his life, reaching out flat-footed with his fat hind legs in a way that nearly sent him head-over-heels.

Hurray! He had made it!—Baldy's wings whistled in the wind as he tried to get

there first. But his steel talons only grasped a clawful of spruce tree. Twinkly was safe,—saved by a tiny forest barely tall enough for him to walk on all fours with comfort. But if his roof was low, it was also close and warm, and cuddling down into a soft hollow out of the wind, he was soon sleeping the sleep of the happy-go-lucky,—while Baldy waited for him to come out!

The next morning the eagle had gone off on some other undertaking, and Twinkly Eyes was free to make his way back down the brook trail to the valleys where spring was already come.

Breakfast had been caught and he was ready for play, when he noticed a round hole in an open patch. Now he had often watched his mother dig for wood-chucks. He sniffed carefully, to make sure it was not the home of Mephitis the skunk. No, he was safe on that score. His nose wasn't quite sure it was a wood-chuck, yet what else could it be that would make so large a hole? He began digging with his customary vigor.

It proved to be a deep, winding burrow, and the sides were patted down as hard as if it had been occupied for years and years. Also, Twinkly Eyes was destined for a big surprise. For this burrow was the home of a family that he had never met. The chipmunks knew more about this family,—to their sorrow. So did the field mice and other wood folk who burrow for their homes.

"Look out, there, Twinkly Eyes!" called Tattletale the jay, who seemed to keep track of everything that went on in the woods. "You're after a tough customer, if you are after Mrs. Badger."

"Mrs. Badger?" exclaimed Twinkly. "Who in the world is she?"

"She'll soon tell you who she is," creaked Tattletale.

"I'm sure I never heard of her before."

"I'm very sure you never did, else you wouldn't be trying to dig her out. She never shows herself except at night."

"Huh!" sniffed the little bear. "Think I'm afraid of anyone her size?"

"Not even if it was Mephitis?"

"Well—just so long as it isn't—"

"She's his cousin. You can tell by the white stripe down her nose.—Though her habits are different, thank goodness."

"Who's habits?" suddenly exclaimed an angry voice. And Twinkly was confronted by a black furry face with not one, but three white stripes running down the pig-like nose. "Don't you know you'll wake the babies if you keep on digging up my front porch?" And she made a grab for Twinkly, setting her teeth into his tender nose.

"G-r-r-r!" said the little black bear. "Let go! Ouch! That hurts!"

"I mean it to hurt," growled Mrs. Badger.

Twinkly tried to back away, but his hostess only drew her broad body farther into the open. She was an enormous animal, with her thick fur,—or so she seemed to poor Twinkly. And her grizzled fur was so thick, and her legs were so short, and her claws were so long, and her teeth shone so

sharp and fierce, that he wasn't the least bit anxious to have it out with her.

Twinkly whimpered an apology. "I didn't want your babies," he tried to explain. "I'm not hungry, really."

But that didn't seem to be altogether the tactful thing to say, to judge by the way it made her gnash her teeth at him. Of course in order to gnash her teeth, though, she had to let go of his nose. Twinkly backed away, licking his injured member.

"Come on, leave her alone," shrilled Tattletale mischievously. "Can't you see she's 'as cross as a bear'?"

CHAPTER X

A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING

TWINKLY EYES lay crouched along the limb of a tree, watching the clay-bank that bordered the sedgy lake shore. The sun warmed him blissfully, and he had fallen half asleep when suddenly he opened his eyes wide. The secret of the clay-bank lay before him!

High up on the side of the bank was a great round hole, much bigger than a woodpecker's. Suddenly out came a frowsy-looking head, with the feathers all sticking straight up, as if the bird had forgotten to brush his hair. The head was given a still more aggressive look by the long, heavy bill. Otherwise Twinkly Eyes might have taken it for simply a great big blue-jay.

A moment more, and a bird not nearly so large as Twinkly had expected flew out above the water and uttered a harsh rattling cry. His head was so enormous that it

made him look top-heavy. It was Mr. Kingfisher, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Hovering over a quiet pool that the little bear knew to be a favorite hiding-place for trout, the bird suddenly plunged headfirst into the water, splashing loudly as he did so. An instant more and he had reappeared with a tiny trout speared on his bill. Flying straight to the overhanging branch of a tree,—what do you suppose he did? He hammered that fish against his perch till it ceased its flapping and lay limp. Then, turning it about till he had it by the head, he swallowed his breakfast with one gulp. He caught another, then a third. The last was an awfully big fish for him to swallow, and Twinkly watched his struggles, believing every moment that he would choke the next. But now he had it all down but the tail, which stuck out of his beak, while his eyes fairly popped with the effort he was making. Then slowly the tail disappeared, and the great bird blinked with satisfaction.

Seeing how happy he looked, Twinkly ventured to call a greeting.

"Now I see why you've got such a big bill," he remarked. But Mr. Kingfisher only turned with a frightened look and flew away, with another of his harsh rattling cries. And he didn't fly in the direction of the clay-bank, either.

"He's afraid you'll find his tunnel," laughed Tattletale, who had perched further up on Twinkly's tree.

"His tunnel?" gasped the little black bear.

"That's what he digs with that bill of his."

"But—but—I thought birds lived in nests."

"He doesn't."

"Oh, that's why I saw him come out of the hole in the clay-bank. I wondered what on earth he was doing in there. But—does he keep the children in there too? I suppose there *are* children?" For in Twinkly's experience every woods family had them, the more, the merrier.

"Are there children?" jeered Tattletale. "You just watch till his mate brings them

out. Ten of the funniest little frowsy-headed birdlets!"

"My, I wish she'd bring them out today!" and Twinkly nearly fell off his perch as he craned his neck to watch. For at that moment Mr. Kingfisher flew back into the hole. But watch as he might, nothing happened, either that day or the next.

The third day, Twinkly shambled quietly over to the clay-bank and laid his wonderful ear to the ground. Sure enough, away down underneath, there was a faint sound that was like neither field-mouse nor anything else he had ever heard. He decided to dig around a little and see what he could see.

Now cave-making comes easy to the kingfishers. They use those big bills of theirs to loosen the clay, then they can claw out whole tunnels with their feet. And before ever they hollow out the nursery, they dig a great long tunnel into the bank.

Twinkly began digging away at the point where he could hear the sounds most plainly. Suddenly, as he lifted a flat stone, he un-

covered a little round room that seemed to be strewn with the bones of dozens and hundreds of tiny fish. But it was not this evidence of the dinner hour that most interested the little bear. No indeed, what made his mischievous eye grow round was the row of wee, top-heavy kingfisher birdlings,—queer, naked things with great, enormous bills just like their father's.

But Twinkly didn't have long to stare, for the next thing he knew, he felt a stab of pain, and there was Mrs. Kingfisher, darting at him with her great beak as if she would like to peck his eyes out. And as she flapped her wings at him, she uttered such a shrill, rattling cry that Mr. Kingfisher heard and came racing wrathfully from his fishing pool.

"You villain, you!" they shrilled, stabbing at poor Twinkly till he had to dodge and duck as fast as possible to keep out of reach. "You'd eat our children, would you? Well, if you don't go away this instant, we'll peck your eyes out!—Sure as fate!" And every one of the ten little kings

uttered the same threat in his babyish rattle.

"Please don't," squealed the little bear. "I just wanted to see what was there. Honestly, I wouldn't touch one of them—"

"Keep your distance, then!" warned the parent birds, flying at him till he had backed clear away. "You've ruined the nursery, as it is. Come on, Father," rattled Mrs. Kingfisher, "don't waste any more time on him. The children will be catching cold if we don't get them under cover right away."

"As if anyone would want to eat the skinny things, anyway!" Twinkly muttered, "when there are so many water lily bulbs and everything. They're all beaks, anyway!—But if I don't get into one kind of trouble, I do another!"

Then he waded out into the lake, till all but his face was under water, and peeked while the great birds dug a new nursery.

Then he scrambled out and went to visit the musk-rat village, where he sat for hours in the drying sunshine, watching to see if the rats would come out. But they only peered warily at him from beneath the

bank, wondering if he really expected them to show themselves in broad daylight,—while he waited, ready to grab them.

Towards sundown he had some good fishing, standing in the riffles, concealed by a clump of reeds. With one quick stroke of his barbed fore-paw he would bat a fish to shore, then pounce upon it, and holding the slippery thing firmly between both feet, crunch it down head first.

After that there were frogs to top off on. Squatting flat on the over-hanging bank, he would feel along beneath the water's edge with one fat paw, seizing the first live thing he touched, before ever it had time to jump.

Then he climbed into a tree-top, where the night wind sung him to sleep, rocking his cradle delightfully. It had been a happy day, despite the little misunderstanding with the kingfisher family,—and on the morrow there would surely be something new going on among the wood folk of Lone Lake. Little did he dream,—swinging away so peacefully, what an amazing thing was to happen!

CHAPTER XI

THE JUGGLER

TWINKLY EYES, the little black bear, was juggling with a floating log.

It is curious how things happen in this world. If he hadn't learned to juggle—but that would be telling too soon!

At any rate, he was proving his title as clown of the woods.

It had been a glorious day. He had begun by ripping a rotten log to pieces for the ants and grubs that he always found underneath the loosened bark. He loved the fat, white, buttery grubs, and the vinegary-tasting little red ants. Together, they made a fine salad. After having torn a strip of the bark away, he would catch the ants by laying his paw on the log and holding still till the insects had climbed aboard for a taste of bear paw. When his fist was thickly covered, he would carry it to his tongue and lick off a juicy mouthful.

Every now and again a grasshopper would whiz by, and alight on the ground beside him. Slap would go his paw, and one more dainty would be carried to that greedy little mouth. Sometimes he chased the lively fellows, snapping his jaws at them like a puppy, as they hopped madly away in their effort to escape. Fat and awkward, the little bear would go tumbling after them, till suddenly his sharp ears would catch the soft squeak of a nestful of field mice. Then he would set to work and dig them out befor they could make up their minds which way to flee. He was a far better mouser than Bobby the Lynx kitten. Once, too, he came upon a bumblebee's nest, and he ate that, clawing the angry bees from his nose, the only spot unprotected by his thick fur.

There were pine buds, by way of dessert, —and new young alder bark, and balsam bark and fir and spruce buds. There was even an aspen sapling whose top he pulled down so he could nibble the tender new green shoots. In the open spaces there was juicy new young grass. There were catkins, too,

and mushrooms. Best of all, down in the creek bed he found little round nests of fish eggs, too delicious for words! It had certainly been a wonderful day for Twinkly Eyes!

His appetite appeased, he chased a rabbit, just to tease her. Then he splashed naughtily in among the ducks, and sent them flying for their lives.

Next he found a floating log and began juggling with it. First he tried to climb aboard one end,—and it was fortunate he didn't mind a ducking. For of course his end went down while the other came up. Then he grabbed it by the middle and threw one leg across, but it rolled over with him, and he emerged blowing water with a series of strangled whoofs.

The log had by this time floated into a little inlet, where the roots stuck into the bank, anchoring it at one end, and Twinkly swam ashore and tried to walk out on the bridge it made. But even his slight weight was enough to send it swirling. As he felt his perch slipping beneath him, he grasped

the log in his strong little arms and waded ashore on his flat hind feet. Dragging his bridge a little way up the bank, with one end still in the stream, he once more tried to walk it, and this time he was more successful.

Then he gave it a shove that sent it whirling into midstream, and made a leap for it. As luck would have it, he landed squarely in the middle, and the log floated off like a raft. But suddenly, shooting over a tiny falls that fed a blue-green pool, it jammed in the rocks and came to a stand-still.

The little bear puffed and panted till he pried it loose. The pool was not deep, and now he tried standing the log upright, like the trunk of a tree, to see if he could climb it. Again and again the silly fellow tried. —Perhaps you have seen the clown at the circus try to climb a ladder that way. But the little clown in fur only ended in a series of tumbles. Finally he got provoked at the log, and setting his teeth in the bark, shook it with all his might, growling ferociously.

After that he climbed a pile of drift-wood

that he found on the bank and pried out another log, but with no better luck. Still, he was having a jolly good time, and more important—as we shall see—he was learning tricks that were to prove their worth before another day had passed.

Now the banks of every brook that led into Lone Lake were piled with a debris of fallen logs and underbrush that the winter storms had torn off the ridges and washed into the gulches. With each spring freshet these logs were washed down the swollen streams into Lone Lake, there to find their way with the current into Rapid River. There was one hillside that was par-tic-u-lar-ly bad, where the forest fire had swept the year before, leaving whole trees charred and ready to fall in the first heavy wind.

So far this spring there had been no freshet, though the rapidly melting snow had raised the streams tremendously. Suddenly, in the chill gray of dawn, a terrific thunder storm came rolling into the sky, and Twinkly, trying to snooze on an old beaver dam, covered his eyes with his paws to

keep out the blinding flashes. But the thunder was even worse, and after each peal he rubbed his sensitive ears unhappily.

Then the rain came,—great, cold splashes of it, with such a wind that when he tried to make for shelter, his feet were fairly blown from under him, and he slipped into the churning water.—My, how it rained! Instead of coming down in drops, it came in sheets, each drop seeming to reach to the next one. It came so fast, and it came so wet, that Twinkly could hardly draw his breath. He puffed and panted in his effort not to swallow the whole storm.

Never had he known such a rain.—Neither, for that matter, had Mother Black Bear, huddled close about the two new baby cubs, who were shivering with cold and fright in the den at the head of the brook-bed. The reason was that this was not a regular rain at all. It was something that doesn't happen once in a life-time. It was a regular cloud-burst. And the water came down so fast, and the ground was soaked so full of melted snow, that it couldn't begin to

sink in. It simply rolled off those hill-sides in sheets.

Into the brook beds it poured, and into the Lake rushed the flooded brooks; and higher and higher rose the foaming waters. Everything was flooded. Mother Black Bear suddenly realized that the water had risen till it wetted her cave floor. It might fill the cave any minute!

As for poor Twinkly Eyes, it simply washed him off into the Brook like a chip of wood. Then it churned him around so fast that he couldn't even begin to swim. He was just able to grasp a floating log.

The next instant, another log came swirling by, struck against the one he was clinging to, up-ended, and hit him whack! across the head!

"Troubles never do come singly," gasped the little black bear.

CHAPTER XII

THE FRESHET

IT had indeed been a cloud-burst!

It had flooded the streams and sent poor Twinkly Eyes off over the muddy waters with his arms clasped tight about a floating log. And Beaver Brook ran as full and as fast as Rapid River, and Lone Lake had waves like the ocean.

Fortunately for such of the wood folk as had been caught too near the rising waters, the streams were full of floating logs. But unfortunately, the logs were piling up on one another in a way that made rafting dangerous. The little bear had received one knock on his head that had raised a fearful welt, and he had to balance like an acrobat to keep a-top his log. On every side was the grinding of one piece of drift-wood against another, as they bumped and scraped together in their mad rush down-stream.

Mother Black Bear whimpered anxiously as the waters rose to the floor of her cave at the head of the brook. Then she called to her cubs,—the wee, velvety fellows,—and taking Bluff, the tiniest one, in her mouth, paddled out of the dripping cave and up the bank.

Dropping him into the crotch of a low-branching tree, she turned to bring Boxer, the larger cub. But already the water had risen so high that he had floated out into the stream. After him she plunged, fearing every instant he would sink.

Grabbing him by the back of the neck, she swung him to her back with one calculating twist of her head, and bade him cling with all fours.

Back up the bank she scrambled with Bluff. Then, taking him in her jaws, she made for a hollow tree, whose opening, about two feet from the ground, had not let the water in. There she crouched, covering the two wet, shivering mites with her own warm body, as she thrust her shoulders into the opening,—by way of shutting the door.

She would lick them dry with her rough, cat-like tongue; and they, being husky little wild-wood babies, would suffer no ill effects.

But Mother Black Bear's family was not the only one that got flooded out of house and home. The Otters' nest was flooded, too, and Father and Mother Otter each had to take a pup in their jaws and swim with them to a bit of drift-wood,—where Mrs. Otter promptly set to work to nurse her babies, who were mewing hungrily.

The musk-rats, too, had been drowned out of their villa, their muddy little hay-stacks of houses having filled with water till their owners had to climb out the chimneys with their ratlets in their jaws. There were so many ratlets, too! At any other time it would have made Twinkly's mouth water. *But their common danger had called a truce. Each drenched animal was too anxious about coming through alive to think of food.*

Snapper the turtle minded the freshet less than any of the wood folk whose home had been around Lone Lake. She was almost like a fish, she could stay under water

so long. And when the waves tossed her against the floating logs, her hard shell protected her from bruises.

Twinkly tried his best to paddle his log in another direction when he saw Snapper coming, but it was no use. The current was too strong for him, and the turtle's snaky eyes gleamed evilly as she climbed aboard one end of his raft. It was the rear end, but Twinkly promptly turned himself about, preferring to float backward in order that he might face her, for he did not trust her. She eyed him crossly, thinking of her eggs hidden in the sand. They would now be drowned unhatched. And she remembered the little affair with the Pike,—for which, unfairly enough, she blamed Twinkly Eyes. —The latter decided to keep a weather eye out for a better log.

The little black ducks had to leave their eggs and go swimming away to safety. But Mrs. Mink, whose home in the hollow stump was now many feet under water, was so busy trying to keep her one surviving minklet

afloat on a drifting branch that she never once thought of trying to harm them.

Father and Mother Lotor, the raccoons, peered anxiously from the hole in the hollow chestnut tree, as the lake rose higher and higher. For whimpering and whinnying inside were the four little 'coons, their wee faces marked with the same black patch as Father's, and striped tails ringed with the family trade-mark. With their hand-like paws they scrambled up the inside of the tree-trunk, and clinging to their parents' backs, took turns peeking.

Across the arm of the lake,—across the disputed fishing grounds, Ringtail and Mrs. Ringtail, the other family of raccoons, peered across at the Lotors, calling greetings and encouragement, their little quarrel forgotten in their common plight.

Frisky Fox had made for his cave on the ridge the moment he knew that a storm was coming, and Fleet Foot the doe and her fawns always slept on a hilltop, so that they were safe enough. But Me-phi-tis the

skunk and cross old Mrs. Badger and their families were flooded out of their underground dens and had to scramble up the hillside, "madder than wet hens," as the saying goes.

"I'm thankful for one thing," said Twinkly Eyes, "I'm glad it isn't Mephitis on the other end of my log. I'd much rather it were Snapper."

Baldy the eagle and Mrs. Baldy were terribly worried, the rain was beating so hard into their nest on Mount Olaf. A little more, and the great structure would be washed away, and the great, featherless eaglets not able to fly. The parent birds took turns sitting with oiled wings tight spread over the frightened youngsters, their eyes gleaming in the lightning flashes. Between the volleys of thunder that echoed from peak to peak, they uttered despairing screams. Even the Ospreys, whom they robbed so mercilessly, would have been sorry for them now, for they were just as worried over their own nest in the tree-top down by Lone Lake.

There were myriads of field mice who were washed out of their tunnels and into the lake before ever they could scramble uphill to safety. These now swam for their lives everywhere about Twinkly's raft, some of them actually climbing aboard. He would have found breakfast an easy matter if he had been hungry. But the truce held. It was life and death for everyone.

The only soul of all that throng of refugees who remained calm and indifferent was Unk Wunk the porcupine whose hollow quills floated him comfortably amidst the excitement.

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE TRUCE

EVERYONE was terrified save Twinkly Eyes.

That mischievous young acrobat had already learned to balance on a floating log, and he was beginning to enjoy the excitement. He had leaped from one log to another till he rode a branching tree trunk. Against the branches, other logs were piling up in a way that was choking the outlet of the lake and making the flood far more dangerous. But with a biff! biff! biff! he knocked each newcomer away till the danger of a log-jam was past.—Indeed, it may be that the naughty fellow was sorry there were not more logs for him to biff! For with one shove of his powerful little fore-arm he could send a visiting log back home again.

The rain ceased, the wind veered 'round, and the lake, though it would be swollen for

many a day, was quieter. Later, the sun fought its way through the clouds.

While the warmth and light cheered most of the refugees immensely, it terrified the Otter family almost more than had the cloud-burst. For they are night people, loving darkness, hating to show themselves by day.

Had Father and Mother Otter been alone, they could easily have made a series of dives beneath the floating logs and swam away to some new home along the muddy shore. Or had an enemy attacked them, they could have put up a first class fight. But there were the four pups.

Now Father and Mother Otter could each have taken a pup in their mouths while they swam to safety. But that would have meant leaving the other two behind, and no telling what might happen to them there, alone, on their raft,—the wee, velvet things, —with so many creatures about that would like to make a meal of them.

Then an idea came to Mother Otter. First she took one pup to shore and hid it

away in a cranny of the rocks, while she left Father Otter to guard the other three. On her return, still leaving him on guard, she got a second. After that they each took one of the two remaining pups to safety.

The ducks rode the flood like so many toy boats, though they were dreadfully uneasy at finding themselves among so many of their enemies. But then, they could always fly away.

As for Lotor and Ringtail, the raccoons, couched high up in their hollow trees,—for fear the waters should creep clear to their entrance holes, they led their cubs still higher, into the top-most branches.

Such funny little whines and whinnies as those little 'coons gave, as they dug their claws into the bark! It was such a terrifying world of gray-green water, churning with logs and alive with swimming animals!

Twinkly Eyes began to wonder if he could not paddle his log to shore. Dangling his broad little palms in the water, as he lay crouched astride his tree-trunk, he tried to row. But the branches were too heavy.

Quick to reason out the trouble, he leaped to a smaller log, one that floated without branches. But it was slow work. Finally he plunged in and swam to a shelving bank.

But now a gleam of mischief twinkled in his eye. For passing on a floating bit of driftwood not far from shore, he could see the little row of kingfishers. They had been driven from their home in the mud bank and forced to take refuge like the rest.

Mother Kingfisher was most distressed, for of course the babies could not fly, and she saw no way of getting them to shore. 'Round and 'round above them she hovered, uttering the most mournful cries, while they, poor hungry waifs, gazed up at her with great, round, trusting eyes, their beaks open for the breakfast they expected her to bring them.

Twinkly reached out from an overhanging shelf of the ledge, pawing at the water to create a current,—not much of one, but enough to bring the log his way. Finally he could barely reach its forward end; and setting his sharp claws into the bark, he drew

it to him, thinking to tease the pair that had so threatened his eye-sight.

Mother Kingfisher watched with a curious gleam in her eyes. At first she was afraid he meant to harm her fledglings. Then to her also came a bright idea! Uttering a quick, sharp command, the moment she saw a corner of the log touch shore, she made the whole row of top-heavy fledglings run along the log and leap to shore.

To them the little black bear had been a god-send.

As for Twinkly Eyes, another log came floating by, and on it, a whole colony of field mice. Now Twinkly was considered a walking mouse-trap. Again the rascal reached out a paw and coaxed the log a little nearer.

"My! I can feast off these fellows for a week!" he was just telling himself, when to his amazement the mice began leaping to land. He had forgotten they could jump so far. "The impudent things!" he thought, turning a somersault after the one whose tail had tickled his nose.

But so swift were they, and so desperate,

that most of them were scuttling up the bank behind him before he half realized that they had escaped him. "Just my luck!" he growled deep down in his throat. "I should have left them on their raft."

But the mice were mighty glad, let me tell you, that rescue had come in such a surprising fashion.

The day passed. One by one the refugees made their way to safety, and found themselves new homes on the receding shore-line of Lone Lake.

There was just one member of the little colony who was missing. Madame Mink and her baby had floated clear through the outlet of the lake into Rapid River, and they had to locate away down stream, where the murderous little creatures could no longer prey upon the ducks and other small folk. No one regretted their departure from the neighborhood, I can assure you.

Mother Black Bear no sooner saw the waters of the flood cease rising than she decided to wait no longer to give Bluff and Boxer swimming lessons. And that very

afternoon she led the droll chaps to a warm shallow, where they were soon mimicking their teacher in every move she made, (or getting spanked if they refused to try.)

Twinkly Eyes, who had perched in a tree-top where he could watch it all, enjoyed it hugely,—especially the spankings.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," he told himself.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SUGAR CAMP

TWINKLY EYES, waking from his all-day nap beneath the roots of the giant maple tree, suddenly sat up and sniffed.

What could that delicious odor be?—Half sweet, half pungent, on the damp night air, it brought back memories of last October, when he had come upon the deserted shack and found the maple-sugar cask.

"That's it!" he told himself, licking his chops at the memory. "Maple sugar!—But where can it be?"

Shuffling forth into the April moonlight, he gazed off down the slope of Mount Olaf, whose woods shone in their silver frost-work.

Pussy-footing it along in the shadows,—just in case he might stumble on a sleeping grouse cock,—he made for the spot whence the odor blew strongest. And his merry

black eyes danced at thought of the treat he would have. For of all the wood folk, this little backwoods boy in fur had the biggest sweet tooth.

Now Twinkly Eyes had never seen a human being, save once or twice the year before, when he had watched a queer little animal who walked on his hind legs all the way, and whistled, and who, instead of wading into the river and catching his fish in his claws, had thrust a long pole with a string on the end of it over the water. The fish had mysteriously appeared at the end of this string. It was all most puzzling.

To-night a new odor was beginning to mingle with the sugary scent, and his clever nose told him that he would find that same queer little man cub on whom he had spied at the trout pool. It would therefore be well to approach with caution. The man cub had not looked dangerous. But he was capable of chasing:—and you never could tell! Twinkly knew all about the folk in fur and feathers, (Bobby Lynx, and Fleet Foot the doe, and Lotor and Ringtail the

Raccoons, to say nothing of the smaller folk. Of these he had no fear,—though it would have taken a good deal to make him go too near either Unk Wunk the porcupine or Mephitis the skunk, after what had happened.) But though the man cub seemed to have neither claws nor anything else that could hurt one, Mother Black Bear's "young hopeful" was a bit wary.

He therefore approached as soundlessly as a shadow. There where the scent lay strongest stood a brand new log cabin which Twinkly Eyes supposed must be the den of the man cub. Just beyond hung a huge iron kettle beneath which mysterious red embers were still glowing. It was from this, and from the many birch bark pails, that the sugary smell arose.

These were filled, some of them, with a brown, watery-looking fluid, which proved sticky on one's paw. My! How wonderful it tasted! Twinkly dipped his fist again and again, licking it joyously (with an ear open for any sign of the man cub's awakening).

There was a shiny basin, too, with a hard-looking sweet stuff inside. Twinkly Eyes reached to investigate, when suddenly—bang! clang!—it went rolling to the stony ground.

The next instant there were voices inside the cabin, a light was struck, and a man's voice rumbled: "Must be a bear! Where's my gun?"

"No, Jake!—Don't shoot!" urged the man cub's treble voice. But Twinkly Eyes of course did not understand. He only knew that there were two of the man creatures, and that he must run.

(Besides, the Hired Man had paid not the slightest heed to the Boy. Gun in hand, he was soon in hot pursuit).

Now bears can run up-hill the fastest of anything alive. Straight up the mountain-side ran the little black bear. Jake followed pantingly.

"Just my luck!" thought Twinkly Eyes. "Trust me to get into trouble if there's any trouble anywhere about to get into."

But he was as clever as a fox at throwing

"Bang! Clang! it went rolling to the ground."

a pursuer off the trail. He had learned something from watching Frisky Fox. First he would jump sidewise, leaving a patch of smooth white snow, without the sign of his little bare foot-prints for Jake to follow. Then he would come to a boulder, and hiding behind it till the man had passed, speed off in quite another direction. Jake, hearing the crashing in the underbrush behind him, would turn and come back. But by this time Twinkly Eyes would have disappeared, and the bewildered Jake could only stare into the open patches where the moon shone brightest, and wonder what had become of the little syrup thief.

Still, he had the black thunder-stick. This Twinkly discovered when Jake suddenly caught sight of the rascal scrambling up a tree, and the stick spoke fire and made his hind leg feel as if a bee had stung it, the bullet cutting a little nick out of his furry hide.

Quickest of all the wood folk to see the reason why, Twinkly Eyes flung himself flat

into the snow-bank where the black stick could not see him.

Thus it happened that, before ever Jake had given up the hunt, Twinkly Eyes was back at the bark pails, dipping his good right fore paw again and again into the sweet sap, and licking it happily as he listened to the heavy breathing of the sleeping man cub within the cabin.

But you may depend upon it that his little round ears heard Jake's returning footsteps, and long before the thunder-stick was near enough to see him, he had made off on noiseless feet (content to wait till the next night for more).

"Well, I'll be jinged!" exclaimed the Hired Man, as he saw Twinkly's new-made tracks. "If that bear hasn't been back here again!—Just let him try it to-morrow night! That's all *I* can say!"

He could hardly wait to collect the sap pails, next morning, and start the stuff to boiling, till he was setting a great steel bear-trap in readiness to catch anyone who came too near the sugar camp.

CHAPTER XV

BLUFF AND BOXER

THE two fat cubs, Bluff and Boxer, sat on the bank watching Mother Black Bear fish.

Ah! There was a movement just under that root! Clapping her barbed paw at the hiding trout, she flipped it to the bank, landing it squarely between the two youngsters.

As the silvery form flashed through the sunny air, both cubs made a grab for it,—and both got it, Bluff by one end and Boxer by the other. But not before they had bumped their heads sharply together.

"Woof! Woof!" growled Bluff angrily, in his high-pitched little voice. Then the pair stood up and began to fight.

First they clinched, each struggling for a chance to bite the other. Next they broke away so suddenly that Bluff turned a somersault.

Before he could get to his feet again, Boxer was upon him, and again they struggled, cuffing and biting and wrestling like two fat puppies.

"Here! Enough of that!" suddenly roared Mother Black Bear, spanking them soundly with the flat of her fore-paw. Biting the flapping fish in two, she bade them sit down side by side and taste it politely.

The cubs hung their heads in shame, for Mother had put them on their good behaviour before she took them fishing. Taking each his piece in his paws, he munched at it meekly, though eyeing his brother out of the tail of his eye for the first sign of grabbing.

They certainly were handsome babies, thought Mother Black Bear. Their silky fur shone glossy where she had licked it smooth, and their eyes danced with mischief. Just now they were well-behaved, —but wait till her back was turned again!

That night she decided to visit the maple sugar camp, leaving Bluff and Boxer curled into one warm ball under the root of a tree.

Woods babies seldom disobey, and they waited right there for her return. But it was morning now; the glow of the rising sun had started all the birds to singing; and the two cubs whined hungrily.

"Mother! Mother!" called Bluff, rising to his funny little fat hind legs and listening, with his paws on his chest.

Boxer, raising his roly-poly self on tiptoe, swung his fuzzy head from side to side as he tested the breeze. But no message did it bring from Mother, and their eyes grew wide with fear. What had happened? Wasn't she ever coming back? For they were fairly famished.

Suddenly down the mossy trail a figure swung into view. It was clad in flannel shirt and overalls, and had moosehide larrigans on its feet.

Neither cub had ever seen a man before, and they shrank back, trembling. But the trapper passed, and nothing happened. Had he been half as keen as Old Man Lynx, he would surely have discovered them, they told themselves. He must be very stupid,

and hence not to be feared, even if he was so big.

The cubs had not yet been weaned. But when the wind that blew down the ravine brought to their nostrils the perfume of fresh maple sap, they just *knew* that it was something good to eat. For it made their mouths water, and they were just simply so hungry that it hurt.

To their surprise, as the delicious odor came nearer and nearer, so did the man, who now swung back down the trail with a birch-bark pail in either hand.

"Let's stop him and get some of that!" said Bluff. "I'm going to jump out and growl at him!" (But he didn't really mean it. He was only trying to bluff his brother.)

"Yes, you are!" sniffed Boxer unbelievingly. "And a lot of good it would do you. Why, an animal that size could eat you in two mouthfuls."

"He won't, though," Bluff declared. "He can't be very hungry, when he has that stuff."

And so starved and lonely were they that they finally decided to trust him.

That is how it came about that Pierre the trapper, returning with his sap, was suddenly confronted with two wee black cubs (whom he would have taken for puppies, had it not been so deep in the woods).

Looking up into his face trustingly, they stood motionless in the path, paws on breast, while he set his pails down and knelt to peer at them through the gathering dusk.

Their next move struck him speechless with surprise. Timidly Boxer shuffled towards him, sniffed warily at the nearest pail, and began licking the side where the sap had spilled. Bluff held back, whining inquiringly, but prepared to run.

"Well, I never!" gasped the man at last. "You poor little mites!" And with a gentleness that was new to him he gathered the orphans into his arms and marched back to his cabin.

There a saucerful of canned milk was warmed and placed on the floor behind the stove, and Pierre thrust their noses into the

inviting fluid. There was a twin gurgle of delight, and the next moment the two cubs were sneezing and spluttering in their eagerness as they tried to suck it up.—It took a little practise to learn how to lap.

"Well, I never!" the trapper kept exclaiming under his breath. At last he had put the cubs to bed in a box padded with an old sweater, where they fell asleep whimpering for the warm furry mother who did not come.

Meantime where was Mother Black Bear? Tip-toeing cautiously about the sugar camp, her mouth watering for a taste of the sweet sap, she had suddenly felt a sharp pain in her fore-paw.—She had stepped into the old trap, which lay hidden under the leaves!

My, how she fought and struggled to get free! Again and again she strove to pull her paw out. Fiercely she gnawed at the steel thing. Angrily she tried to claw it to pieces. But it was no use. She was a prisoner! The best she could do was to drag it with her.

Now the Hired Man had foreseen that she

would do this very thing. To prevent her dragging herself and the trap away off somewhere, he had chained the trap to the butt of a fallen tree. Of course now she had to drag the whole log with her.

Then she saw two trees that grew close together, and it occurred to her that if she were to go between those trees, the branches of the log would get caught, and she would have something to pull against. This is just what happened. But even that did no good. She could not pull her fingers loose, try how she might.

Frantic at thought of her babies, who would starve, or get caught, if she did not come back, she was desperate enough to have gnawed her paw off and left it there. But fortunately, at that moment, Twinkly Eyes, her yearling cub, came shuffling up to her.

"This is queer," he grunted. "Just let me see, now, what the trouble is," and he set to work to investigate what it was that held her fast. But even he could find no way to solve the mystery. Plainly the sugar camp was a dangerous place.

Now, as it happened, the trap was a rusty old affair that hadn't been used for years. It also happened that Mother Black Bear was the champion boxer of all the woods around. Her great body was so strong and muscular that with one blow of her fore-paw she could smash a rotten log to smithereens. And you can imagine that she did not spare the trap.

My, how she banged and battered that rusty old affair about, whacking it now against a tree trunk, now against a stone. At first the old trap held. The moon traveled clear across the sky, and still she was a prisoner. Her fore-arm hurt like the tooth ache. Now the morning star was all that showed in the paling sky.—Then a spiral of smoke rose from the cabin chimney! The Man would come now and put a finish to her!

Too frenzied even to feel the pain, she banged the trap with all her might on a stone.—This time something gave way! She could feel the rusty steel jaws easing up ever so little on her fore-paw.

Mother Black Bear needed no urging to

pull her tortured fingers loose, and she was free!

Limping on three legs, she raced to where she had left her babies.

They were gone!—Gone with one of those terrifying human creatures, too! (Her nose told her that).

She moaned heart-brokenly, then started to follow where the trapper had gone.

CHAPTER XVI

A GOOD RESOLUTION

THE cubs awoke at dawn, when the trapper made his breakfast and gave them theirs.

Then they found themselves alone in the cabin. At first they did not mind. For the place was full of the most delicious smells. Though of course they didn't know what it was, there was bacon hanging from the rafters, a great long loaf of black bread, and onions on long strings.

What interested them even more was that same fragant odor that had come from the sap pails the night before. They were not long in discovering that this time it came from up on the table, whose red cloth was laid with shining aluminum ware.

Bluff climbed up the leg of the bunk, on whose balsam boughs Pierre had slept. From there he found it an easy leap to the

table, and in a moment more his little pointed nose was thrust deep into the syrup pitcher, and his black eyes were twinkling in delight. For with his pink tongue he was having a wonderful experience.

Boxer rose on his hind legs inquiringly. Then, seeing that his brother was enjoying himself so hugely, he started to climb the table leg. But his little claws only caught in the red table cloth, pulling it off with all its pans and plates tumbling about his ears.

Bluff, his head fast wedged in the syrup pitcher, had his feet suddenly dragged from under him, and over he rolled, pitcher, syrup, and all, into the struggling mass that was Boxer and the red table cloth.

When finally he got his head free, without even stopping to lick off the syrup that now dripped from his fur, he pitched into Boxer, whom he blamed for his fall.

The trapper, returning at this moment, found them cuffing and boxing each other angrily about the syrupy cabin.

The cubs were startled by shouts of laughter, which frightened them so that they crept

to the darkest corner under the bunk, and crouched trembling there in each other's arms.

The next surprise came in the form of a pail of warm, soapy water, into which Pierre gently inserted the small Bluff. At first the water was so nearly the same warmth as the air that the tiny rascal didn't know anything was happening to him. But the instant he realized that he was getting a bath, he gave one wild leap, that upset the pail over the syrupy floor, and sent the dripping cub through the open door into the sunshine.

Nor did he stop running till he realized he was alone. Then he hid under a tree root and took a nap while his fur dried all soft and fluffy again.

When he woke up he was hungry, and with memories of the saucerful of milk to lend him courage, he followed his own foot-steps back to the cabin.

Boxer, meantime, after having seen what had happened to his brother, had decided he was better off under the bed, and had only

growled and refused to budge when the trapper gently tried to pry him out.

So Pierre, laughing mightily, had scrubbed the floor and washed his dishes and red tablecloth, and had then gone away, leaving the door tight latched behind him.

Little did he dream, as he brought in his traps that morning (for it would soon be time to return to the settlements), that a huge black form, with teeth that snarled silently, was nosing this way and that along the trails over which he had tramped.

Had Mother Black Bear come upon him when he was poking the cub, there is no telling what she might not have done to him, so fearful was she that he meant harm to her babies. But luckily for Pierre, his trail had wound about so over the whole ravine that she did not come to the cabin till he had gone, leaving the cub inside.

Even then her attention was distracted by a joyous little whine, as Bluff came galloping down the wind to her.

My, how tenderly she greeted him! How anxiously she nosed him over, reading the

whole story of the man and the syrup pitcher and the pail of soap and water on his fur!

Then Boxer's lonesome squeal came to her eager ears, and spanking Bluff up into the nearest tree to wait for her return, she raced to the other little fellow's rescue.

She scratched and clawed the door with all her might, but it was fast barred. Then she rose on her great hind feet and peered in at the window. There was the missing cub, who had climbed to the upper bunk to look out.

"Mother! Mother!" he whined appealingly.

"There, there, now!—Shall I come in and get you, or can you climb out alone?" she asked in the soft little woof she kept for her cubs.

"Huh! Guess I can climb out myself, if you'll lift me down," he sniffed, reassured.

A moment more and the feat was accomplished, and Mother Black Bear was leading her little family to a new den, where the man could not find them.

"Well, I've trapped my last bear, so help me!" vowed Pierre the trapper, when his practised eye had read the story in their muddy footprints.

In the next book, "Twinkly Eyes at Valley Farm," we are going to find out what happened to the little black bear when he went back to visit the sugar camp again.

THE END

D. C. P. L.

OCT 12 1921

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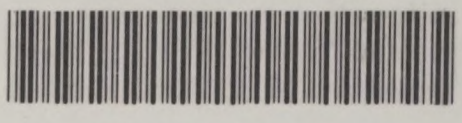

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